

PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION
OF H.R. 1279, GANG DETERRENCE
AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION
ACT OF 2005

SPEECH OF

HON. EARL BLUMENAUER

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, May 11, 2005

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 6) to ensure jobs for our future with secure, affordable, and reliable energy:

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Chairman, I strongly believe that the United States should be doing more to reduce violent crimes, whether they are committed by gangs or individuals. I voted against the "Gang Deterrence and Community Protection Act of 2005" because it fails to address this problem and impairs our judicial system. H.R. 1279 increases penalties for non-violent crimes, while imposing mandatory minimum sentences and expanding the death penalty. These provisions do nothing to detour gang violence and limit judge's ability to impose sentences that fit the offense. Furthermore, the bill does not include early intervention programs or other preventative programs that could be successful in reducing gang violence. I am hopeful that Congress will work to pass legislation that addresses the core issues behind this serious problem.

WE MUST IMPROVE OUTCOMES
FOR CHILDREN LEAVING FOSTER
CARE

HON. GEORGE MILLER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 12, 2005

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California. Mr. Speaker, the circumstances described in the following report from Monday's National Public Radio program clearly indicates the urgent need to overhaul the child welfare system in order to improve outcomes for children aging out of foster care.

A recent study by Harvard Medical School and Casey Family Programs measured some of the aftereffects of foster care. That study concluded that fewer than 27 percent of foster youth who graduated high school went on to college as compared to 52 percent of the general population. And for those who do begin college, the dropout rate for foster youth is extremely high. More than eighty percent of all foster care youth who enroll in college will drop out before graduation.

In addition to lack of funds and the inability to access the limited federal and state funds that are available, foster youth suffer other unique disadvantages. While other students are concerned with academic pressures, foster care youth are worried about housing and being alone during holidays and breaks when dormitories are closed.

Next week I will propose legislation to address the shortcomings of the child welfare system by improving outcomes for children leaving foster care by awarding grants to colleges and universities to recruit foster care students; provide academic counseling; pro-

vide financial aid counseling; and provide other appropriate supportive educational services.

The article follows:

[From the Minnesota Public Radio, May 9, 2005]

FOSTER-CARE SYSTEM OFTEN ENDS UP HURTING THE KIDS IT WAS DESIGNED TO PROTECT
(By Hilary Wicai)

May is National Foster Care Month. The foster-care system was created to care for children who are abused or neglected or whose parents can't care for them, but a recent study of former foster-care kids finds many end up hurt by the system that was supposed to protect them, and once they turn 18, they're on their own, often without the skills they need to fend for themselves. The damage takes both an emotional and an economic toll as MARKETPLACE's Hilary Wicai reports from the work and family desk.

Jessica Lindsay was 14 when a couple of police officers pulled her out of class.

Ms. JESSICA LINDSAY (Former Foster Child): My mother is—she's a schizophrenic, and she's been that way my whole life.

WICAI: Jessica and her mother had a bad fight the day before and the police told Jessica she couldn't go home again ever.

Ms. LINDSAY: 'Well, why can't I go home?' 'Well, your mother threatened to kill you, so we have to remove you from the home.'

WICAI: That began Jessica's three-year journey through three social workers, two foster families, four group homes and four high schools. Moving around a lot is part of the system. If kids are in care for four years or more, 37 moves are the median.

Ms. MARIAN HERRICK (Former Foster Child): I mean, I have another friend who's lived in over 45 homes when she was in foster care. Yeah.

WICAI: Marian Herrick spent seven years in foster care after her dad went to prison. Herrick says many don't know what foster children go through because they learn not to tell their stories. Her best friend in middle school taught her that.

Ms. HERRICK: Her mom told her that she needed to find a normal friend because I was in foster care. So it's like there's definitely that stigma. Just answering the most basic questions are difficult, like, 'Where are you from?' 'Well, I'm not really from any one city.'

WICAI: Foster children aren't from any one city in large part because the system is out of balance. There are only about a hundred thousand foster families for 600,000 children in care. That's why many, especially teen-agers like Jessica Lindsay, end up in group homes where they're looked after by low-wage shift workers. Care in a group home can cost taxpayers nearly 10 times more than family foster care. At one group home, Jessica had trouble sleeping. The doctor put her on sleeping pills which made her sleep through class but she took them.

Ms. LINDSAY: If you don't comply with what they tell you to do, you can't get any of your rewards that you're supposed to get, like going outside. They reward you for good behavior, but you're not a criminal. You're here because something happened to you, not because you did something.

WICAI: A recent study showed post-traumatic stress disorder rates among foster-care alumni are almost twice as high as in US veterans of war. The study by Harvard Medical School and Casey Family Programs measured some of the aftereffects of foster care. Ruth Massinga is president of Casey. She says the picture is grim for young adults now out of care.

Ms. RUTH MASSINGA (President, Casey Family Programs): Only 80 percent of the

study participants were employed as compared to 95 percent of the general population. One-third of the participants had incomes at or below the poverty level. One-third had no health insurance, and nearly a quarter had experienced homelessness after leaving foster care.

Mr. GARY STANGLER (Co-author, "On Their Own"): At 18, we say, 'Happy birthday. You're on your own.'

WICAI: Gary Stangler used to run Missouri's foster-care system. He recently co-authored a book called "On Their Own."

Mr. STANGLER: There are literally places in the country where young people are emancipated from foster care and they are delivered to a homeless shelter.

WICAI: He says there's nothing magic about turning 18 if you're undereducated, lack job skills and have nowhere to go. He says as they're shuffled around, many foster kids don't learn anything about paying bills, finding an apartment, filing taxes, even tying a tie for a job interview. Now 19, Jessica Lindsay has her own apartment in Michigan but only after a couple of false starts with college and financial aid.

Ms. LINDSAY: This is what I needed and this is what I got, and now look at what I have to deal with.

WICAI: So she works full time, seeing that other foster youth get a better start.

Unidentified Woman: Clap once if you can hear me!

WICAI: She was recently accepted to the Child Welfare League of America's National Foster Youth Advisory Council. The group advocates and lobbies for better foster-care policies.

Unidentified Woman: . . . worked so hard we've already put in a seven-hour day with . . .

WICAI: This month, they met in Washington, DC, to discuss how to promote the idea of more permanent placements for foster children. With groups like this behind her, Jessica is more hopeful that her third attempt at college will be more successful. Jessica's goal is to graduate. That would help increase the number of foster-care alumni with bachelor's degrees. Right now, it's only 2 percent.

IN RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL
POLICE WEEK

HON. ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 12, 2005

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to our fallen heroes and to offer my heartfelt thanks to our brave men and women in blue.

Yesterday, sadly, was an eerily familiar day. Once again, fighter jets circled the bright blue sky and alarms echoed throughout the halls of Congress. As my colleagues and I rushed off the House floor, a police officer exclaimed, "This is not a test! Run!"

Mr. Speaker, there was fear in the officer's eyes, but there was bravery in her voice. This was the moment for which she had trained, and she was determined to shepherd us to safety. I thanked God, once again, for the commitment, courage and competence of the Capitol Police.

Mr. Speaker, it is all too fitting that this week is National Police Week. When an unidentified aircraft entered restricted air space yesterday, Members of Congress witnessed the efficiency and fearlessness of our police force first-hand.